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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000866

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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS MINISTRY COMPLAINS OF LOW DONOR  
SUPPORT

Classified By: DEPUTY POLCOUNS ROBERT GILCHRIST FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and  
(d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR) senior officials complained to PolOffs March 6 that they had yet to see substantive assistance from international donors, despite efforts by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to coordinate such assistance. At the heart of the ministry's eagerness for international support lies frustration with poorly skilled staff which, despite discrete successes in prisons inspections and missing persons programs, have demonstrated little progress in reporting or promoting human rights awareness. Some of the hesitation for international donors to step forward is likely linked to plans to set up a separate independent Human Rights Commission that will assume many of the current functions of the MoHR. End Summary.

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MANY PROMISES, BUT LITTLE AID  
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¶2. (C) During a March 6 tour of the ministry, MoHR staff complained to PolOffs that the ministry has yet to see substantive results UNAMI-led working groups for assistance to the ministry or of any promises made to the Minister on trips abroad. The staff highlighted in particular their desire for assistance in the following areas: 1) establishment of a human rights violation database, 2) assistance in developing a human rights awareness campaign, 3) enhancement of ministry staff's ability to report on human rights abuses, and 4) capacity-building of the legal department to review proposed legislation for consistency with national human rights principles.

¶3. (C) Over the past year, UNAMI's human rights office has coordinated meetings between potential international donors and MoHR staff to help the ministry identify its needs while encouraging potential donors to provide assistance. The response from international donors has been to provide some general human rights training to ministry staff over the past year. MoHR Minister Wijdan Mikh'ail Salim, however, characterizes these efforts as "piecemeal" and "insignificant." "We have had many promises made to us over the past year, but little follow-through", remarked Director General of Humanitarian Affairs, Ahmed al Atar to PolOffs.

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LOW-SKILLED STAFF FIGHT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
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¶4. (C) Ministry officials, including Director General al-Atar, report they are generally unable to access even basic training in Iraq for many of their low-skilled staff. Minister Wijdan has regularly complained that the

staff fails to produce products that reach minimal professional expectations. With over 300 employees in Baghdad and throughout the provinces, very few of the staff had professional backgrounds in human rights or related fields prior to coming to the ministry after its creation in 2003. For many, the ministry is their first office job. The minister notes that despite efforts to recruit qualified employees, none have appeared - perhaps the result of an ongoing brain drain as many educated Iraqis leaving the country due to the ongoing violence.

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BIGGEST WEAKNESS: HUMAN RIGHTS AWARENESS/REPORTING  
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15. (C) The ministry particularly lacks expertise in developing and implementing human right awareness campaigns. The Minister has often noted that one of her goals has been to educate the public about basic human rights principles. Often observing arbitrary detention or physical abuse, Iraqis rarely assign the same type of seriousness to these abuses as some Western societies might. Therefore, possibly out of both fear and acclimation, citizens rarely report physical abuse by government agents to government officials. For these reasons and more, the Minister told PolOffs she was disappointed that her staff lacks the vision and skill to craft campaigns to educate Iraqis on their basic rights. Similarly, others in the Ministry complained that when reports of abuse do come in, staff cannot adequately collect information and present it in a way that captures human rights violations.

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ONE AREA WHERE THE MINISTRY FUNCTIONS  
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16. (C) Despite the ministry's ailments, Minister Widjan acknowledged its prisons and missing persons directorate has enjoyed relative success. This is a result of strong management on the part of director of the section, Saad Sultan. MoHR's prison section regularly conducts detention facility visits and pushes for prison condition improvements. It also helps families locate missing relatives. Families of the missing come daily to the ministry for information on loved ones possibly held in Coalition or Iraqi-maintained detention facilities. It obtains names of detainees from Coalition forces and during unannounced prison inspection visits.

17. (SBU) Since MoHR databases only document about 10 percent of missing person cases -- gleaned from dozens of monthly detention center visits -- the prisons and missing persons directorate must coordinate closely with other parts of the government to locate missing persons. Working in an assembly line fashion, it collects and forwards missing persons' names and photos to the Ministries of Interior, Justice, Defense, Labor and Social Affairs, and morgue system to seek leads on the missing person. This process provides an important service for families who out of fear otherwise would not go to the police to seek similar help. During the visit to the ministry, PolOffs observed Iraqis lined up in an orderly fashion in the directorate and taking turns -- as in a U.S. DMV office -- to meet individually with MoHR representatives.

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COMMENT  
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18. (C) Some of the hesitation by donors to provide assistance to the MoHR is a result of its unclear mandate and Council of Representatives plans -- supported by UNAMI and others -- to set up a Human Rights Commission that will assume many of the roles of the current Ministry. Many

international donors are reticent to invest in personnel at a Ministry that may have a completely different function in a few years time. A reduction of UNAMI staff resident in Iraq may have also had an impact on donor awareness and support. At the same time, UNAMI Human Rights staff have also

noted a limited capacity of the MoHR to absorb higher levels of assistance as well as a lack of focus by the Ministry as to what it actually needs. Nonetheless, the MoHR is currently the only government entity actively advocating for human rights, and Minister Wijdan has been particularly vocal in this regard. The MoHR also fulfills a role for citizens who feel they have nowhere else to go to report abuses, look for missing family members, or seek other assistance as a result of ongoing violence.

SPECKHARD